

Shaw Shunning Mardi Gras

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NEW ORLEANS, Feb. 9— With only three days of the Clay Shaw trial under its belt, this city of charm and diversity is well on its way to accepting the trial as one of the two great circuses in town.

The other one, of course, is the Mardi Gras celebration that is building to a high point a week from Tuesday.

Unlike past years, Shaw is not taking part in the annual festivities. It would be "most imprudent," he said, declining to elaborate because of trial restrictions on newspaper interviews.

Friends of Shaw, less reticent and admittedly less charitable toward Shaw's accuser, say the reason is that "Jim Garrison would find a new way to frame Clay."

Garrison, the District Attorney for Orleans Parish, has mustered the full power of his office to bring Shaw to trial on a charge of conspiring to murder President Kennedy.

His investigation has both terrified and entertained much of New Orleans, where Lee Harvey Oswald lived in 1963 and where Garrison says plots were hatched.

Mixed Credibility

Garrison's prosecutors have offered testimony of mixed credibility placing Shaw with Oswald and the late David Ferrie, two men whom Shaw denies knowing, in the same rural section near Baton Rouge the summer before the assassination.

They have sprung a surprise witness and seen him backfire, a plausible-seeming man whose destruction under cross-examination inevitably brought to mind the court-martial testimony of Capt. Queeg in "The Caine Mutiny." The witness was Charles I. Spiesel, who was unsuccessful in peddling

his story of a party attended by Ferrie and Shaw until Garrison bought it and put him on the stand.

It is still far from clear why Garrison happened to fasten on Shaw with the charge that the prominent social figure and business promoter used the alias "Clay Bertrand" or "Clem Bertrand" in conspiratorial dealings with Oswald and Ferrie.

Lawyer's Story

As reconstructed by Edward Jay Epstein, a harsh critic of Warren Commission but now an even harsher critic of Garrison's methods, the prosecutor worked from a story by a New Orleans lawyer who claimed, and later denied, that a Clem Bertrand had

sought legal help for Oswald after his arrest in Dallas.

In Epstein's new book, "Counterplot," the author says Garrison theorized that the lawyer was covering up for "a wealthy client with homosexual associates."

Shaw, 55, who built this port city's International Trade Mart after World War II and pioneered the restoration of the French Quarter, is widely respected in easygoing New Orleans as an able, genial man whose personal life is strictly his own business.

Yet there is an undercurrent at the trial and some apprehension that the prosecution intends to get rough. Garrison investigators executed an open-ended search warrant at Shaw's home after arresting him two years ago and made much of the seizure of a chain, pieces of leather and rope, a black hood and cape.

Shaw's friends make no apology for his personal life—though they complain of terribly exaggerated rumors—but they insist that the confiscated items are irrelevant to it. The reason: They

were part of a Mardi Gras costume, which gets back to why Shaw isn't celebrating this year.

How is Shaw taking it all? With apparent good humor, if, his courtroom demeanor is any guide. With the consolation of philosophy, the study of religion and the company of friends, say his loyal supporters.

The trial resumes Monday with star State witness Perry Russo, whose testimony about an alleged Shaw-Oswald-Ferrie meeting is considered the key to Garrison's case.